

The Real Causes of America's Wars, Lecture 5

The Onset of the Cold War and
the Korean War

World War II and the Cold War

- The Cold War can't be understood without WWII.
- By far the most important part of WWII was the conflict between Germany and Russia.
- In the 6 weeks after D-Day, June 6, 1944, total German casualties were 140,000. During the single week June 22-June 29, 1944, in the single Vitebsk sector of the Byelorussian front, German casualties were 480,000. Vitebsk is a city in Belarus.

Germany vs. Russia

- After Germany invaded Russia June 22, 1941, there was all-out war. If one side won, it would dominate Central and Eastern Europe.
- By allying with Russia, Roosevelt had chosen Russian dominance of Central and Eastern Europe.

FDR and Russia

- During the war, FDR did *not* have the attitude: Russia is a totalitarian dictatorship, on the same level of the Nazis.
- To the contrary, he had a high opinion of Stalin. He thought that he could influence Stalin through his personal charm.

FDR and Stalin

- According to William C. Bullitt, the former American Ambassador to Moscow, FDR told him. “I think if I give him everything I possibly can, and ask nothing from him in return, *noblesse oblige*, he won’t try to annex anything and will work with me for a world of peace and democracy.”

FDR and Britain

- FDR was hostile to the British Empire. He wanted British colonies to become independent. One reason for this was that American business interests wanted to supplant the British in the British-controlled areas.
- He didn't regard himself as allied with Churchill, the British Prime Minister, against Stalin.

The Problem of Poland

- WWII began after Britain and France declared war on Germany after the German invasion of Poland, September 1, 1939.
- Britain guaranteed the borders of Poland in March 1939, and the German attack on Poland was the ostensible reason for the war.
- When Russia invaded Poland on Sept. 17, it became clear that the British guarantee didn't apply against Russia.

Poland Continued

- After Russia invaded, they followed a brutal occupation policy. They took over about 52% of Poland.
- The Polish army who had resisted the Russian invasion weren't given POW status.
- About 22,000 Polish officers, police, and intellectuals were murdered near the Katyn Forest in 1941.

More Poland

- About 1,200,000 People from Poland were deported.
- When the Germans gained control of the Katyn area in 1943, they discovered the mass graves and conducted an investigation that blamed the Russians.
- The Polish government-in-exile asked for an accounting from the Russians and Russia broke off relations. Russia actually wanted a Communist government in post-war Poland.

America and Russian Expansion

- There was very little America could have done about this; but Roosevelt at the Yalta Conference (Feb 1945) recognized the Communist backed provisional government, with an unenforceable promise to include other democratic elements.

Expansion Continued

- The Russian incorporation of parts of East Poland was recognized; Poland would receive compensation at the expense of Germany.
- FDR was very concerned about Polish voters in the US, so he wanted something as a fig-leaf. But he didn't oppose the Russians.

FDR's Policy

- The US decision to support Russia over Germany insured that Russia's position in Europe would be strengthened after the war. But the insistence on unconditional surrender at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943 made Russian gains even more certain.

Churchill and Roosevelt

- Churchill had been a long-time anti-Communist. He called for military intervention against the Bolsheviks after WWI.
- He thought that FDR wasn't taking enough account of Russian ambitions. He thought FDR was naive about Stalin and Communism.

Churchill and Roosevelt

Continued

- The differences between Churchill and FDR shouldn't be exaggerated. Churchill's opinion of Stalin went up in the war.
- He didn't oppose unconditional surrender, but he opposed plans for a second front in France, which Stalin wanted. He was concerned about which armies would get to Germany first

Churchill Continued

- At the Tehran Conference, (Nov-Dec 1943) Churchill accepted a dominant role for Russia in Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Baltic states, and Romania.

End of WWII

- At the end of WWII, American policymakers faced an important decision. What would be the reaction to the increased Russian power in Europe?
- Three options were available: nonintervention, containment, and rollback.

Nonintervention

- The Old Right, e.g., John T. Flynn, thought that the US should go back to the traditional position of non-involvement in Europe. Russia was not in a position to threaten America militarily. America was economically and militarily the strongest nation on earth.

Nonintervention Continued

- There were a few political leaders who supported nonintervention, e.g., Senator Robert Taft of Ohio and ex-President Herbert Hoover. They were not always opposed to intervention in Asia.

Nature of the Communist Threat

- The noninterventionists correctly saw that the main Communist threat was *internal*, not *external*.
- In the US during WWII, the Communist Party and many sympathizers had great influence.
- There were many Communists in high places, e.g., Harry Dexter White, in charge of international affairs for Treasury Dept. and the chief aide to Secretary Henry Morgenthau.

Containment

- The approach that prevailed was containment. This held that the verdict in Eastern and Central Europe couldn't be reversed in the immediate future, but the Soviets should be stopped from advancing farther, e.g., into France and Italy.

Containment Continued

- The supporters of view included George Kennan, who formulated the policy, and Dean Acheson, who became Secretary of State under Truman.
- Containment was behind Truman's March 1947 call for aid to Greece and Turkey, to prevent these countries from going communist. The Truman Doctrine. Acheson admitted that scare-tactics were used to promote this.

More Containment

- Marshall Plan aid to Western Europe from 1948 to 1952 was another example of containment. Some businesses benefited from this also.
- Kennan thought that eventually the Communist states would collapse internally. Note parallels with Mises's calculation argument.

Rollback and Preventive War

- A third option wasn't that we shouldn't be satisfied with preventing the Russians from going farther.
- We should end their conquests, if necessary by preventive war.
- This had some support in the military, but it did not win out. It came to influence American conservatives, especially around *National Review*. This replaced the Old Right.

Asia

- We've been talking about Europe, but World War II was fought in Asia as well.
- There were two Chinese groups fighting against the Japanese: the Nationalist Government, headed by Chiang Kai-Shek and the Communists, led by Mao Tse Tung and Chou En Lai.

China

- Russia didn't get into the war against Japan until August 1945 but the Russians helped the Chinese Communists.
- The Communists had many supporters in the US, including some in the US government. The Communists were portrayed as mere “agrarian reformers.”

China Continued

- Besides the pro-Communists, such as Owen Lattimore, there were many people in the government who had a poor opinion of Chiang Kai-Shek.
- The Secretary of State, George Marshall, wanted Chiang to form a coalition with the Communists, even though they wanted to take over the government

More China

- China fell to the Communists in 1949.
- Chiang Kai-Shek fled to Formosa, where he established a government-in-exile.
- Marshall and Acheson came under a great deal of criticism for their policies in China.
- Senator McCarthy and the “China Lobby” attacked Marshall and Acheson

Korea

- Acheson applied containment to Asia as well as Europe. He didn't favor overthrowing the Chinese Communists, but he didn't want communism to advance further in Asia.
- Kennan didn't think Asia was important for US security.

The Armistice and Occupation

- Acheson thought that American interests in Asia required a strong Japanese economy. This would also help American business.
- When Japan surrendered in 1945, the US Army occupied the Southern part of Korea from 1945-1948.
- The demarcation line, the 38th parallel, was arbitrary. It was made by an official in the State Department , Dean Rusk.

Korea and Japan

- Korea had been an independent kingdom for over 1000 years.
- The Japanese took it over as a protectorate in 1904-5 and annexed it in 1910.
- In the period between then and 1945, there was a division in Korean society between those who favored collaboration with the Japanese and those who resisted

North Korea

- The Russians and Chinese supported a Communist regime in North Korea. This was headed by Kim Il Sung, who had been a leader in the anti-Japanese resistance.
- When the American occupation ended in 1948, a new government headed by the strongly anti-Communist Syngman Rhee came into power

Civil War

- Both governments claimed to be the only legitimate government of all of Korea.
- There were several border incursions on both sides. In June 1950 the North Koreans attacked. Kim Il Sung cleared with Stalin.
- Dean Acheson on his own initiative decided to intervene. It wasn't clear why America had any security interest in

No Declaration of War

- Acheson of course cleared his decision with President Truman but there was no attempt to secure a declaration of war from Congress. Instead, the US secured a mandate from the UN. This was unconstitutional and a dangerous departure from the American tradition.

War

- After being pushed back, the Americans and South Koreans rallied with the Inchon landing in Sept 1950, enabling them to regain Seoul.
- General Douglas MacArthur then pressed north. He had the full approval of Acheson and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.
- When McArthur crossed the 38th parallel, Acheson said this was an imaginary line. This destroyed the basis for US intervention, i.e., that one nation had invaded another

MacArthur and Truman

- The Chinese entered in force and an eventual stalemate resulted.
- Truman contemplated using atomic weapons. Again, there was no divergence between MacArthur and the Administration. He was removed because Truman and Acheson didn't trust him.